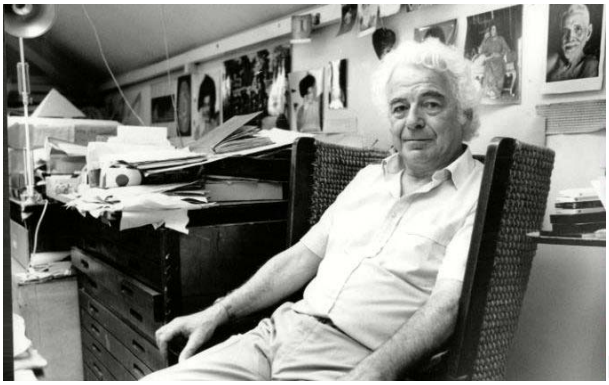
The Telegraph

Benjamin Creme, artist and esotericist – obituary

1 Comment



Benjamin Creme CREDIT: STEVE BENT/ANL/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

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Benjamin Creme, who has died aged 93, was a Scottish painter, esotericist and author who spent much of his life as an evangelist for the coming of a "new world teacher", whom Creme called Maitreya.

Creme, who claimed to be in telepathic communication with one of a community of ascended Masters living in the Himalayas, travelled the world espousing his message of Maitreya's coming, gathering a large following.

He first came to international attention in 1982 when he took out a series of full-page advertisements in newspapers in Europe and America and staged a press conference in Los Angeles proclaiming the arrival of Maitreya who, according to Creme, had left his abode in the Himalayas in a "self-created" human body, and flown from Pakistan in a Jumbo jet to London, where he was working as a night porter in a hospital.

There, he was preparing for the "Day of Declaration", in which he would reveal himself via global television and usher in a new age of peace and harmony.

Creme's announcement prompted an unseemly rush of news reporters to London's East End, making enquiries about the possible whereabouts of this "new Christ".

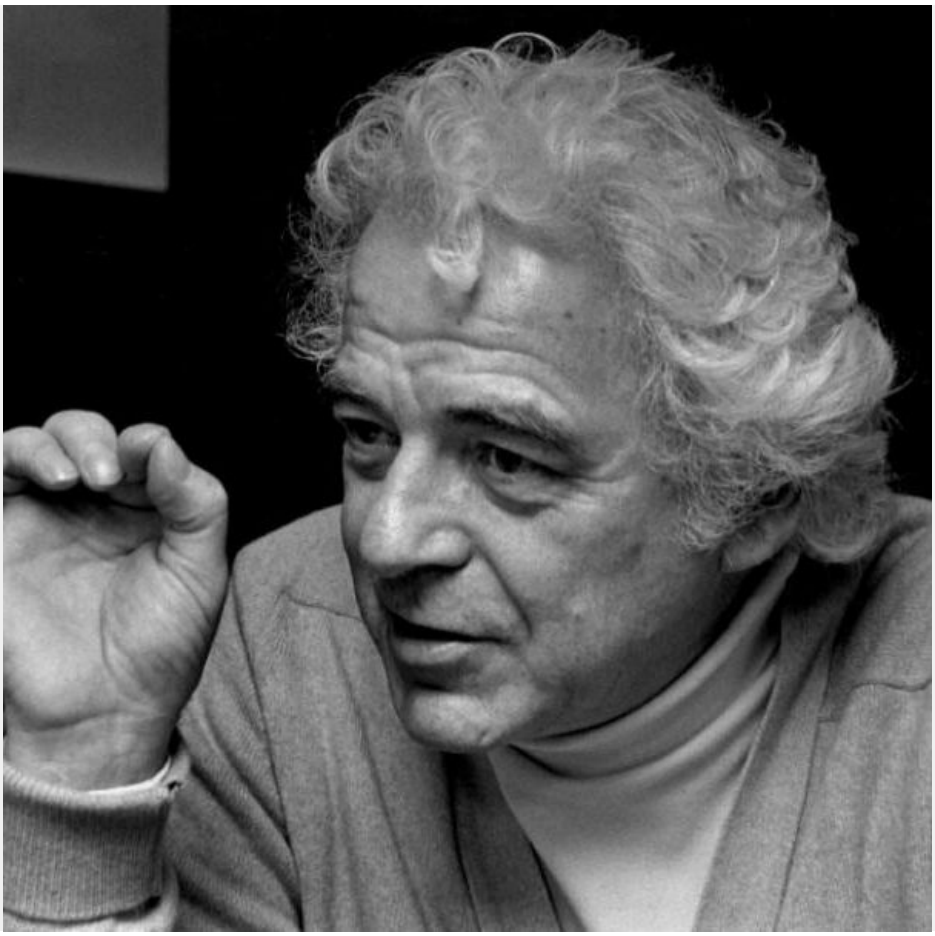
To facilitate his work, Creme established a magazine, Share International, which published communications purportedly coming from Creme's own Master and regular bulletins about Maitreya's ongoing, if hidden, influence in world affairs. It was due to

Maitreya's influence, it was claimed, that the German chancellor Willy Brandt had set up the Brandt Commision to further negotiations on global development.

Maitreya had also held secret discussions with the chairman of the BBC,, Alasdair Milne, about a proposed television appearance. In 1988 Share International published a photograph of a bearded man dressed in a robe who had reportedly made a fleeting appearance at a prayer meeting in Nairobi, explaining that this was Maitreya, and that the Day of Revelation was nigh.

The utopian optimism of Creme's mission gained considerable purchase among enthusiasts of "New Age" beliefs. Share International was published in 70 countries, and Creme travelled throughout Europe, America, South America and Japan addressing public meetings, as well as speaking frequently on radio. He also wrote 16 books on esoteric subjects.

In the parallel universe of millenarian enthusiasm, his claims seemed to be taken equally seriously by some fundamentalist Christian organisations, who regularly attacked the mild-mannered Scotsman as an apostle of the "anti-Christ" prophesised in the Book of Revelation, and an avatar of the dreaded spectre of "World Government".



Benjamin Creme CREDIT: DAVE BURESH/THE DENVER POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

Benjamin Creme was born in Glasgow on December 5 1922, into what he described as an "upper-working class" family. His Russian Jewish father was an importer and exporter of china. His mother was an Irish Catholic who for a brief time took up spiritualism, christening her new-born son by the spiritualist name of "Light".

Creme had early ambitions to be an artist, and left school at 16 to concentrate on painting; throughout his life he would earn a living from selling his works. His interest in metaphysics and the occult was first awakened at the age of 14 when he encountered the writings of the Belgian-French explorer and Buddhist Alexandra David Neel, who had travelled through Tibet in the early 20th century, reaching Lhasa at a time when the city was closed to foreigners.

Creme claimed that through close study of her books he was able to master the Tibetan yogic practice of "tumo", or inner-heat.

He extended his studies through the teachings of Gurdjieff, Ouspensky and the Indian swamis Yogananda and Sri Ramana Maharshi, but it was the writings of Madame Blavatsky, the Russian occultist and founder of the Theosophical Society, and the esoterist Alice Bailey, that were to prove formative.

Blavatsky had maintained that she was in contact with a group of advanced spiritual adepts whom she called the Hierarchy of Masters, and talked of the coming of a new world teacher named Maitreya - the fourth historical Buddha in Tibetan Buddhist cosmology. Blavatsky's millenarian message was further elaborated by Alice Bailey, who in 1923 broke away from the Theosopical Society to found her own Arcane Society, and claimed to be in contact with her own realised Master whom she called "The Tibetan".

Alice Bailey believed that the hierarchy of Masters inhabited the mythical city of Shamballah, which had been founded by Venusians some 18 million years ago on a site in the Gobi desert.

Thus inspired, Creme became a member of the Aetherius Society, a UFO-contactee group which had been founded by the eccentric "Sir" George King, who had been working as a taxi-driver until one day in 1954 when, while he was drying some dishes, a loud voice instructed him to "Prepare yourself! You are to become the Voice of Interplanetary Parliament." King claimed the voice came from an entity living on Venus named Aetherius.

Creme became the society's vice-president, but broke with them in 1958 following a disagreement with King. The following year he experienced his own epiphany, claiming to have had his first telepathic communication with one of the same Hierarchy of Masters who had been in contact with Blavatsky and Bailey.

This Master, Creme maintained, instructed him to pave the way for the coming of Maitreya. Creme gathered a small group around him and began to hold public lectures to spread his message.

A highly engaging speaker, his meetings would often begin with a tape recorder, operated by a bespectacled woman in a cardigan, playing recordings of his Master "speaking through" Creme.

At an appropriate point in the proceedings he would warn his audience that he was about to enter a meditative state during which he would be "overshadowed" by the power of Maitreya and that they should not be alarmed if they noticed anything unusual.

Thus prepared, it was not uncommon for some to report having witnessed Creme suffused in a golden glow, or to have seen the face of Maitreya super-imposed on his.

Creme was a genial and cultivated man with a compendious knowledge of art, philosophy and classical music, and a love of cricket. He had a particular disdain for the tinkly banalities of "New Age" music, which he pronounced "newage", to rhyme with sewage.

He lived modestly in a semi-detached house in Tufnell Park, North London, receiving no money for his talks, and claiming that it was actually "embarrassing" to have been "chosen" as the emissary of the new Christ.

"My job", he once said, "has been to make the initial approach to the public, to help create a climate of hope and expectancy. If I can do that, I'll be well pleased." Nor did he seem in any way discouraged by Maitreya's apparently obdurate reluctance to appear as promised, explaining that it would be in contravention of man's free will for him to do so without an invitation from suitably high-ranking figures from politics and the media.

These requirements appeared to have been met when in December 2008 Creme made his most emphatic declaration to date, claiming that "a bright star" would shortly appear in the sky heralding Maitreya's appearance on a major American television programme when he would finally reveal himself.

Over the years, Creme became accustomed to ridicule and mockery, which he treated with equanimity. "Scepticism is fine," he once said. "But I don't like cynicism. I say, keep an open mind."

His first wife, Peggy, died in 1965. He is survived by his second wife, Phyllis, whom he married in 1968, by their son and daughter, and by a son of his first marriage.